

West Virginia Executive Branch Privacy Tip of the Week

Requests for PII

Question:

Periodically I have to sign a confidentiality agreement at my office but I don't really understand why. Can you give me the scoop on this?

Answer:

Your confidentiality agreement requires you to protect personally identifiable information (PII) and other information that is entrusted to you by your Department. It is very important that you take the following steps for *every* request for PII that you receive:

- ✓ Consider the sensitivity of the PII. If the PII is sensitive, such as Social Security number, home address or medical information, extra steps may be needed to ensure that the information is only being provided to an authorized person for an appropriate purpose. If you have any questions at all about a person's authority or the planned use of the PII, contact your manager or Privacy Officer *before* you disclose the information.
- ✓ Consider how any data requested could potentially be misused and leveraged to gain access to other, potentially more sensitive data. For example, social engineers don't start off asking for what they really want. They start out making seemingly innocent requests to see if you will be cooperative, and if you are, then they build up to more and more sensitive requests. Always consider the risk associated with the request, whatever it is.
- ✓ Be cautious about providing access to restricted areas to people you don't know. While it seems like good manners to hold a door for someone, you should confirm that the person has a badge that would actually allow access to the area.
- ✓ Always follow your Department's policies and procedures for handling PII.